

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 2023

President Martha Pollack,  
Cornell University  
300 Day Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853

Dear President Pollack:

I am writing to you in profound disgust and disappointment at the recent statements by Professor Russell Rickford. While I sincerely appreciate your statements released on October 16 and 17, I demand to know what, if any, disciplinary action will be taken against Mr. Rickford for his horrific statements. As you stated yourself, Professor Rickford's comments "demonstrate no regard whatsoever for humanity."

As you know, while speaking at a pro-Palestine protest on Cornell's campus, Mr. Rickford referred to the ongoing attack on Israel by the terrorist group Hamas as "energizing" and "exhilarating." Regardless of one's views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the loss of human life, especially the lives of women, children, and the elderly, including Holocaust survivors, should never be referred to as "energizing" or "exhilarating." Mr. Rickford received support from the crowd of Cornell students and faculty. His support for terrorism and dehumanizing statements are not appropriate for a college campus, especially one supported by American taxpayer dollars.

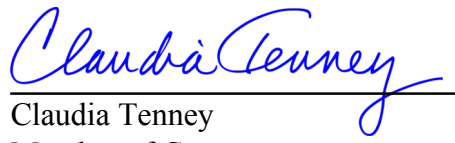
In the wake of the horrific attacks by the Palestinian terror group Hamas, hundreds of innocent Israelis and dozens of Americans have been killed and taken hostage. Israel, which has been fighting for its own survival for 75 years, is a liberal parliamentary democracy with established civil rights protections and the rule of law. In that light, it is despicable that violent anti-Israeli attitudes have permeated countless American universities, including Cornell, which are supposed to uphold the ideals of our First Amendment principles. Additionally, it is incredibly disappointing that this rhetoric has been tolerated and allowed to prosper under your leadership at Cornell University. Support for freedom of expression and academic discourse does not include fostering support and approval of terrorist violence.

Anti-Semitism should not be tolerated in academia or any other part of a civilized society. Professor Rickford holds a position within the university that allows him to mold and influence young minds. This position demands a higher standard of behavior, one that is free from anti-Semitic rhetoric and the vocal support of terrorism. By perpetuating these abhorrent views, Professor Rickford has not only violated his ethical responsibility as an educator, but has also jeopardized the safety of the Jewish community and tarnished Cornell University's reputation. I sincerely hope that, as the President of Cornell, you will take this matter seriously and understand the severity of these faculty statements.

In light of the gravity of this situation, it is absolutely vital that Professor Rickford immediately resign from his position as an educator at Cornell. While I am aware that Professor Rickford has issued an apology, these heinous remarks are irredeemable, and anybody who espouses such hatred should not remain on Cornell's campus in such a position of prestige. Such rhetoric should not be tolerated at our universities and in our society in general. If, as you stated, Professor Rickford's views "speak in direct opposition to all we stand for at Cornell," and "demonstrate no regard whatsoever for humanity," then Professor Rickford must resign or be fired.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I respectfully request an update no later than November 1, 2023 on what actions your office has taken with respect to Professor Rickford's employment.

Sincerely,

  
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Claudia Tenney  
Member of Congress